

*A. Campbell: Notes on the Irish House. II*

Finally, I will draw attention to the stone-built sheepfolds and other shelters and fences for the cattle, the study of which cannot be separated from the study of the primitive houseforms. Of particular interest to the Irish material of that kind is the material published by Daniel Bruun,<sup>19</sup> Mårten Stenberger<sup>20</sup> and other authors. J. Nihlén and G. Boëthius<sup>21</sup> reproduce in connection with this, some stone walls from the Aran Islands.

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*A glance at the literary material.*

The archaeologists, as has already been mentioned, have studied the stone-built bee-hive houses, but from them we have not many references to houses built of other material, although such houses must naturally have existed. Remarkable is the settlement in Canowheel Mountain, Sligo, consisting of 47 circular walls enclosing spaces of from 20 to 42 feet in diameter. "These were probably protection walls erected to shield from weather huts erected within them and made of flimsy materials."<sup>22</sup>

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In Ireland, there can have existed a millennial tradition of building houses not only with dry stone walls, *falla: fuara*, as in the stone-built *clocháns*, but also with walls of mud or clods, *fallai feidin*, and of *fraigh*, i. e. panel of mud and wattle or lath and plaster construction. The word *fraigh* occurs in some ancient proverbs and phrases signifying the actual wall of the house.<sup>23</sup> In the ancient Irish laws, the word is used for walls of houses. Beyond doubt, *fraigh* means, if Dinneen's interpretation holds, the same wall construction as has been used in Southern Scandinavia and the neighbouring parts of the Continent, from prehistoric times down to the last century.

Although the very comprehensive and learned work of Eugene O'Curry<sup>24</sup> has a number of references to the buildings of the Ancient Irish, it is not easy to gather from them the exact constructional details, nor to decide whether O'Curry has drawn the right conclusions from the terminology in the Laws and the literature. I will not here discuss O'Curry's description, as I am not in a position either to check his conclusions or compare them with the archaeological remains or present day habitations regarding the constructional details here in question. I only sum up some remarks from O'Curry that will be useful for further discussion.

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O'Curry says that ancient habitations were of the simplest character and constructed of wood or, where wood was scarce, of mud. The wooden houses however were made either of wicker-work, or of unhewn, or at best roughly hewn trees, the crevices being filled by mud. (I would suggest that

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174 these two wooden wall types can perhaps be compared with such Danish and  
342 Scanian walltypes as the "stakavägg" and the "sprötvägg".<sup>22</sup>) The houses  
were of two forms, 1) long quadrilateral buildings, built of wood or mud  
and straw like the existing mud cabins, and covered with thatch, and 2) cy-  
lindrical houses made of wicker-work and having a cup-shaped or hemi-  
spherical roof. The houses built in duns and in stone *caiscals*, and those sur-  
rounded by mounds of earth, were probably in all cases round houses. As  
has already been mentioned, O'Curry is of the opinion that the Gaulish wic-  
ker-houses shown on the Column of Antonius correspond accurately to the  
*teck darach* or oak-house with a *cuach-cleithe* or wicker cup roof described in  
a tale called the "Intoxication of Ulster".

The round wicker-work house is described by O'Curry as follows: "The  
round wicker house was built by setting up perpendicularly a number of  
poles or posts of more or less solidity arranged in a circle of the necessary  
diameter and at equal distances from each other. The interstices between  
these poles or posts were then filled up with stout hazel and other rods in  
the form of wicker or basket work until it reached the required height of  
the wall. In the meantime there was firmly set up in the centre within a  
stout post called a *tuireadh* of length commensurate with the required height  
of the roof: into which were inserted by mortices or otherwise attached a  
certain number of rafters which descended slantingly all round to the tops  
of the upright posts of the wall into which they were received by tenon and  
mortice or otherwise attached. — — —

Across the rafters and ribs thus inserted were then laid bands of laths or  
narrow slips of wood which were fastened with pegs or with gods, i. e. twisted  
withies forming a regular network from the top of the roof-tree to the  
walls. On these, again, were laid or fastened, at short distances, what may be  
called a sheeting of rods and thin branches of trees, stretching from the roof-  
tree to the wall. And now, the shell of the house being finished, it was  
thatched with straw, rushes, or sedge and neatly fastened down with scollops.  
— — — I cannot say how they staunched the walls of the round wicker-  
house, whether with clay, moss, or skins — — —."

In the Ancient Irish Laws are many references to the wicker-house, *teck  
fithi*.<sup>23</sup>

The following quotation is a translation of part of a law tract which deals  
here with the status of an *óaire*, one of the lesser of the freeholding ranks.<sup>24</sup>

"The size of his house: it is larger than a house of rentcharge. For the  
size of the latter is seventeen feet. It is of wickerwork to the lintel. From  
this to the roof-tree, a *dit* between every two weavings (?). Two doorways

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in it. A door for one of them, a hurdle for the other, and this (the hurdle) without (projecting) wattles, without protuberances (?). A bare fence of boards around it. An oaken plank between every two beds."

The designations in the Laws and in early tales as *Fled Bricrend*, *Suidgud Taigi Midehuarta* etc., are still difficult to understand, as their vocabulary has not hitherto been elucidated. It will be possible to draw more definite conclusions from them as soon as a joint study by philologists and ethnologists has been carried out. In many parts of Ireland there still survive remains of old building traditions, which in connection with the dialect words, will help to throw light upon the problems of ancient building culture as they are met with in the old Irish literature.

A consideration of the old upper-class house, however, embraces a field outside the scope of this article, involving a discussion of cultural connections over a very wide area."

Described in Part I of this article, *Folkiv* 1937, 2/3, p. 207-234. I repeat my thanks expressed in my former article to the Irish Folklore Commission and to my Irish friends. I want to add the names of Professor Eóin Mac Néill, Mr. Thomas Mason and Miss Máire Mac Néill, who have kindly given me information and assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril Fox, *The Personality of Britain*, Cardiff 1933, p. 34 sq.

<sup>3</sup> Wheeler, *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, Oxford 1925, p. 260 sq., and Bosch-Gimpera, *Etnologia de la Península Ibérica*, Barcelona 1932, p. 490 sq.

<sup>4</sup> *The Archaeology of Ireland*, p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy XXXI*, p. 209 sq. Still other references to beehive houses may be found in archaeological literature. Oscar Montelius has previously dealt with beehive houses, *s. g.* in *Boning, grav och tempel*, *Antikvarisk tidskrift*, vol. 21.

<sup>6</sup> In *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. III, p. 127 sq., and vol. VII, p. 153 sq.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Analecta Hibernica* No. 2, Jan. 1931 p. 53; Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland 1780*.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.* vol. III, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> See R. E. M. Wheeler, *op. cit.* p. 261.

<sup>10</sup> See P. Bosch-Gimpera, *op. cit.*, p. 490 sq.

<sup>11</sup> See *s. g.* S. O. Addy, *The Evolution of the English House*, London 1933, p. 38 sq.; S. Erixon, *Some primitive constructions*, *Folkiv* 1937, 2/3, p. 124 sq.

<sup>12</sup> Norse building customs, in the *British Isles*, Copenhagen 1934.

<sup>13a</sup> *Ireland: its Scenery, Character, etc.*, Vol. III, London 1843.

<sup>13b</sup> Caesar Otway, *A tour in Connaught: comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce County, and Achill*, Dublin 1839.

<sup>13c</sup> *Folkiv* 1937, p. 208.

<sup>13d</sup> See *Folkiv* 1937, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> The study of the Scottish material shows that the ancient so-called forts or subterranean or semi-subterranean chambers may also be considered. I shall not, however, enter here on a discussion of this complicated matter.

<sup>14b</sup> I am also grateful to Mr. Mason for having supplied all the photographs of Irish *clocháns* used by me in this article.

<sup>15</sup> On the manners and customs of the ancient Irish, vol. III, p. 33 and elsewhere.

gal, Mayo and West Galway, Kerry and (in part) Cork. The Aran Islands represent a fourth western area. West Donegal seems to be characterized by excesses of dark hair and mixed eyes and a very slightly higher mesocephaly than the total Irish series. Mayo is slightly high in stature and in cephalic index, definitely so in proportions of dark hair and mixed eyes. West Galway, on the other hand, is notable for markedly tall stature, lowering of the cephalic index, and lighter hair and eyes. This tendency is still further accentuated in the Aran Islands which are tallest of all of the Irish subgroups, are almost dolichocephalic, and have nearly the highest proportion of light hair shades. Yet eye color in the Aran Islands is predominantly mixed.

Kerry is also tall, but the most round-headed of the Irish subgroups and excessive in dark hair, and lowest in light eyes.

The central plain of Ireland and especially the counties of Westmeath and Longford show the strongest concentration of blondness which is accompanied by slightly shortened stature, diminished lightness of eye, and mesocephaly. This blond area is sharply delimited to the east by a coastal band of darker haired and even shorter dolichocephals, notably concentrated in Meath, Louth, and County Dublin, which is the shortest and most dolichocephalic area of Ireland, but ranks high both in darkness of hair and in lightness of eyes.

Now it is quite reckless to attempt definitive racial correlations on the basis of the coincidences and differences in geographical distribution of separately plotted anthropological characters. Actually, racial type distributions can be accurately ascertained only by correlations of morphological and metric features in individuals. From the data presented in this paper, however, a few purely preliminary and tentative suggestions may be made, subject to revision or retraction in the light of an exhaustive study of all of the material and a consideration of historical and prehistorical events.

It may be presumed that the western parts of the island represent to some extent refuge areas occupied by the earlier strata of the population. It is in precisely these areas (West

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142 Donegal, Mayo, West Galway, the Aran Islands and Kerry)  
● 174 that our information gives us the highest predominance of  
[197] Gaelic speech. If the anthropological characters plotted separately actually combine in the populations of these areas we should say that the earliest population stratum of the island consists of tall, subbrachycephals with dark hair and mixed eyes and a second element, even taller, subdolichocephalic with light hair and mixed eyes. Then since the latter type presents the highest proportion of Gaelic speakers we should be inclined to hazard a guess that the tall brunet brachycephals represent the earlier pre-Keltic population and that Gaelic languages were introduced by the tall, long-headed near-blonds.

The blond, long-headed element in the central plain, concentrated in Longford and Westmeath is presumably Nordic and possibly represents a survival in great part from Iron Age Nordic, Viking, and other Scandinavian occupations. The Aran Islanders and the inhabitants of Galway may perhaps owe their comparative blondness and long-headedness to the mixture with these invaders which has gone on throughout the plain, but it is also possible, as previously stated, that the original Goidelic invaders may have been near-Nordics.

Along the east coast the short dark dolichocephals with long heads but very light eyes may also be, for the most part, the survivals of pre-Keltic populations. Some element in the population must have been responsible for the introduction of the Megalithic monuments and I believe it to have been these brunets with blue eyes. The association of light eyes with dark hair was formerly considered by me to be the result of the crossing of a pure brunet Mediterranean stock with a pure blond Nordic stock in which the eye color of one race combined with the hair color of another. However, recent anthropometric studies in Iran and Iraq, especially those of Dr. Henry Field, reveal the presence of many otherwise purely brunet, long-headed stocks of basic Mediterranean affinities which have almost no pure brown eyes, but generally irides of mixed pigmentation—brown in the pupillary zone and blue in the

peripheral zones. Of course, there can be no doubt that the inhabitants of Ireland have undergone extensive mixture with blue-eyed Nordics. However, it seems certain that some Mediterranean stocks have developed what Dr. Carleton Coon calls "incipient eye blondness" without any necessary intermixture with the generally depigmented Nordic race. 142  
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One consideration in regard to the county subgroups must be given some space here. The highest percentage of dark hair occurs in Waterford and Wexford and the highest percentage of light hair in Longford and Westmeath. Now blondness in mixed stocks diminishes with age and it happens that the Waterford and Wexford subgroup is the oldest of the nineteen included in the series (38.80 years), whereas the Longford, Westmeath group is the youngest (29.45 years). The latter is, in fact, 3 years below the mean age of any other subgroup. Thus it is possible that the blondness of this subgroup may have been exaggerated by this age factor, but it hardly seems probable that the excess of dark hair in Wexford and Waterford is wholly due to superior age since the increments of age bring excessive graying of hair (at a maximum) in this group. This senile change detracts from the proportion of dark hair. 142

One of the most striking facts of the anthropometric distributions here plotted is the dolichocephalic blond crescent which swings from the northwest at Sligo Bay through the Central Plain and back westward terminating in West Galway and the Aran Islands. It suggests rather strongly a Nordic penetration by way of these west coast ports. It is tempting to connect it with the Viking period. Ingress to the rich lands of the Central Plain would have been possible by this route, although it must not be forgotten that West Galway—a barren area—has this same blondness and long-headedness associated with tall stature. It is also notable that this blond crescent is not as light-eyed as the areas further east, and, in its central portion, is not characterized by particularly high stature. Further, its dolichocephaly is not so marked as that of the counties to the east of the upper course of the Shannon. 174

142 On the basis then of these raw distribution maps on which  
174 are plotted uncorrelated anthropometric means and pigmen-  
tation percentages we may discern the following three more  
or less clearly demarcated anthropological and geographical  
areas.

1. The Western Peninsulas: West Donegal, Mayo and Kerry (including parts of Clare and Cork). This region finds the association of tall stature, sub-brachycephaly, dark hair and mixed eyes. It is strongly Gaelic in speech and possibly includes the largest numbers of the Mesolithic stock which first settled Ireland from Scotland.

2. The Central East Coast: The shortest and most dolichocephalic region with highest concentration of light eyes (especially blue eyes), but very dark hair. Perhaps this may be the area settled by the Megalithic people who sailed up the Irish Channel.

3. The Blond Crescent (with its horns at Sligo and Galway Bays and its convexity at Longford and Westmeath). In its belly it is the blondest area in Ireland, in the southwest horn (West Galway and the Aran Islands) it is the tallest and almost the longest-headed area in Ireland. All of this area is notably characterized by grayish and light mixed eyes rather than pure blue eyes. It seems to be peopled by a majority of Predominantly Nordic and Nordic peoples. It may contain the bulk of the descendants of any or all of the three following putative groups of early populations: Bronze Age peoples coming from Scotland (Goidels?); Iron Age Nordic invaders (if there were such); Viking and other Scandinavian historic colonists, possibly entering by way of Galway and Sligo Bays.

It should be reiterated here that superimposed distribution maps of isolated characters may not represent in any accurate sense the combinations of features in individuals which constitute racial types. Subsequent study of the distribution of racial types by individuals may alter considerably our prediction of the arrangement of racial areas in Ireland.

# CHAPTER VI.

## VILLAGE AND BOOLEY.

361 Throughout the Irish countryside the farmhouses and cottages lie scattered as though casually spilt over the surface, forming an even film of population everywhere except in the mountains and bogs. Among students of rural settlement this country is rightly taken as one of the best European examples of the dispersed type of habitation. We very rarely see, except in a few exotic "plantations" which languish here and there, large agricultural villages of the English or European pattern, with their tree-shaded greens, their shops, churches and inns. A cluster of more than a dozen houses is almost sure to be the result of industrial influence—the erection of a mill or factory. Such a scheme of scattered dwellings, each set among its own fields, seems appropriate to a region where there are no inducements such as the needs of defence or the lack of water to encourage agglomeration, and where pastoral interests predominate, the animals needing constant attention.

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● 174 But if we look more carefully at the Irish scene, and if we turn back to the records of history and prehistory, we shall find proof that the completely isolated farms are a fairly modern feature in most parts, and that house-clusters formerly predominated. Here and there, especially in the west, we see little "clusters" "onsets" or "clachans" of peasant houses, a dozen or so together, which preserve something of the character of the old villages we shall try to describe in this chapter. Over a wider area we find smaller clusters, three or

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361 four houses together, which can almost invariably be shown  
 174 to have once been larger: even these tiny groupings are  
 referred to as "towns," and the use of this word suggests  
 that such clusters were once the nuclei of the "townlands."  
 It is because of this association with the vital townland unit,  
 and because many rural customs find their explanation in  
 past conditions, that I have thought it worth while to attempt  
 a reconstruction of the chief features of these old communities.  
 This is based largely on records and on surviving examples  
 which I have studied in Co. Donegal and Co. Antrim. Allow-  
 ance must be made for differences between one region and  
 another, but I believe the following description to be applicable  
 to most parts of Ireland, though the decay of the village-  
 system began earlier in some areas than in others.

Travellers a century or so ago tell us that villages with  
 50 or 60 houses were not uncommon. In 1802 Donegal is  
 said to have had about 500 villages, with an average perhaps  
 of 20 or 30 families to each, but they were "dispersing daily into  
 separate habitations and holdings" (Figs. 13 & 14). One uses  
 the term village for want of a better word, for such clusters  
 lack many of the well-known features of the English village.  
 They were essentially communities of related families bound  
 together in "friendship"—the word "friend" means a  
 blood-relation in Ireland—with one or two surnames pre-  
 dominating in each group. This fact is still true of townland  
 populations even though the holdings are scattered, and it  
 helps to explain the prevalence of nicknames in rural Ireland,  
 [55] and, for the same reason, in Wales and Scotland. The houses  
 were clustered without plan or order (and never strung  
 together end-to-end) generally in some sheltered hollow in the  
 richest part of the townland, though they might be disposed  
 along a road with some semblance of regularity. Shelter is  
 always the first consideration. I have been told in Donegal  
 that house sites were selected by the simple process of throwing  
 up a hat on a windy day and letting the wind decide by  
 noting its resting place.

174 Made roads were almost unknown in hilly districts—there  
 491 was "no wheel car" among a population of 8,000 in one  
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361 Donegal parish in 1837—and all the carrying depended upon slide cars and creels (Chapter 12). The village had neither shop nor inn, and required little besides salt and iron from the market town. These self-sufficing communities were held together by blood ties and by the exchange of services under the Irish open-field or "rundale" system of cultivation. Around the house-clusters were small walled gardens and haggards, but the arable land was an unenclosed open field in which each holder had his scattered patches, averaging perhaps a quarter of an acre in area. There are cases on record where [423] 29 partnership-peasants shared 422 plots of ground, where one man held 32 different patches, or again where 26 people had shares in a field of half an acre. In some districts it is known that the plots changed hands periodically. but no memory of this survives in the areas I am acquainted with. Live stock was sometimes subject to joint-ownership, with disastrous results where, for instance, three men claimed shares in a horse and could not agree as to the ownership of the fourth leg. But most of the stories that are told about rundale farming belong to the period of its decline.

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361 Between the cultivated patches, which were dug with the spade or ploughed and devoted almost exclusively to potatoes and oats, ran waste strips or balks ("mearings," "bones" or "ribs") often left as much as three yards wide, apparently from a sort of pride, though they had their uses both as a source of hay and as tracks for the creel ponies when they could not enter the waterlogged plots. In the absence of fences all livestock had to be tethered, spancelled, herded, or sent to the mountain pastures during the crop season, which traditionally began on St. Patrick's Day (March 17th) and ended on the last day of October (Hallowe'en), when the animals were free to wander over the whole townland throughout the winter. "Any that had not their potatoes dug, or other crops off the ground, were much injured, neither could any one man venture to grow turnips, clover or other green crops . . . no one would attempt to manure better or otherwise improve his proportion, as his neighbour's cattle only would have the benefit." It is clear that the introduction of the

potato was one of the factors that led to the decline of rundale agriculture, both because of its late harvest and because it resulted in increased populations which brought disastrous subdivision of the holdings. Under the "gavelkind" code of inheritance a man's property was divided equally among all his sons, so that the impossibly small fields came to be spoken of not as the standard "cow's grass," but as a "foot" and even a half-foot or "cleet." 174  
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Much has been written of the drawbacks of the rundale system. It is so easy to condemn it—the "fights, trespasses, confusion, disputes and assaults" to which it gave rise, the wretched poverty which it bred, the evil consequences of dwelling in packed house clusters—that it is well to recall the better side of the system before it fell into decline. A writer in 1853 has left his "recollections of nights of social converse, of aid in sickness, of sympathy in joy and sorrow, of combined operations of defence against bailiff or gauger which contrasted mournfully with the solitary grandeur of the new dwelling." Another apologist wrote: "the closer the rundale system is followed, the more the unwritten customs and regulations observed, the more do intelligent tenants regret a departure from them." Many of its better features, indeed, have survived the enclosure movement and the separation of farms; we may cite co-operation in farm work and the social fire-side evenings or "caileys." "Gatherings" of many kinds, for work and pleasure, distinguished the rundale communities. Every village had its musician, piper or fiddler, who was often maimed in some way and supported himself by his skill. Folk songs, occupational airs and epic tales were kept alive in this way. 174  
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It was formerly the task of an appointed leader in a townland or group of townlands to see that customs were observed, to arrange the casting of lots in re-allotting strips, and so on. Probably we should see in the "king" not long ago recognized as leader in such communities as Rathlin and Tory a relic of this custom. [622]

To understand the village-system in working order we must see it as part of a wider pattern in which cattle-herding 174  
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174 played a dominant part, to which the claims of agriculture were  
 621 subordinated. It was customary for the young folk, and in  
 221 some cases the whole family, to leave the village as soon as the  
 231 crops were sown and migrate to summer pastures among the  
 hills. This custom is still widely followed in various mountain  
 areas in Europe, for instance Switzerland and Spain, where it  
 can be shown to be of great antiquity. To it the name  
 "transhumance" is given, but we shall use the term "booley-  
 ing," from "booley" (milking place), or summer hill dwelling.  
 It is strange that scarcely any attention has been given or  
 any importance attached to this aspect of the Irish past,  
 despite its direct bearing on the social and cultural as well  
 as the economic development of rural Ireland, on language  
 and literature, music and the arts. From rare memories or  
 survivals of the custom—it is still followed on Achill Island—  
 and by analogy with transhumant societies overseas, we can  
 envisage the part played by booleying in ancient Ireland,  
 where its wide occurrence was facilitated by the presence  
 of scattered mountain masses in all parts of the island  
 (Chapter 2). We shall refer to some survivals below. The  
 illustration (Fig. 15) shows a bullock's "horn" which used to  
 be blown not long ago at a farm in the Torr Head district of  
 Co. Antrim, to summon people together. One is tempted to  
 see in this custom a relic of the pastoral heritage. Traditions  
 of hospitality are a common accompaniment of pastoral life:  
 there is no need to stress the reputation of the country people  
 in this connexion, but it is relevant to add that the lavish  
 hospitality for which the landed aristocracy have been famous  
 may well have been derived from Gaelic custom.



Fig. 15.

Wherever it is found, this seasonal nomadism assumes a ritual significance, especially where, as in the old Ireland, cattle are its main concern. Thus the departure of the herds and their attendants in spring is accompanied by festivities and ceremonial; and the return to the homestead in autumn is the occasion for the rejoicings and reunions of Hallowe'en, when the youngsters play seasonal games among themselves and tricks upon their elders. We shall revert to this topic in chapter 17. Here we are concerned rather to describe the life

among the hill pastures. In spring, after a long winter, the cows were often so weak that they had to be carried out of the byre. When sufficiently restored they were driven together with the sheep and in some cases the poultry, to the hills. In Donegal, according to an account written a century ago, "the migration usually took place upon a fixed day, the junior members of the family generally perform the journey on the top of the household goods, and thus the chair or two, the creels, and the iron pot, the piggin, and the various selected *et cetera*—as if invested with a sort of dull locomotive power—creep along the roads. The little churn is slung on one side of the animal, into which the youngest child is often thrust, its head being the only part visible."

Many townland names ending in "booley" or "boley" assist us in our search for evidence, while in many places the actual remains of the booleys can still be seen. They were generally built of sods or turf, or of wicker-work faced with sods, and roofed with branches and heather. Some were circular and others square or rectangular, and the latter had two opposite doors through which, it seems, the cows passed in turn as they were milked inside, a tradition which is still kept up in the two-doored cabins of Co. Kerry, where Dr. Campbell has described how, in summer, the cows are milked in the kitchen, entering at the front door and being driven out by the back. The booleys were built in clusters, the inhabitants of a particular "town" presumably living together. Butter-making was the chief occupation, and the food of the herders consisted largely of "whitemeats" that is milk products such as curds and whey. Cheese seems to have been of minor importance, though sheep were milked and it is probable that, as is customary among the transhumants of southern Europe, the milk was made into cheese. The butter appears to have been preserved—it was un-salted—by burying it in wooden, skin, bark or cloth containers in the bog. This "bog-butter" frequently turns up in turf-cutting operations: it is white or yellowish in colour and smells like ripe old cheese. A keg dug up in Co. Meath was found to contain over seven stones of butter.

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[25]

ages. He sees the country taking complete possession of the town, blocking its streets, ignoring its traffic: he is in the presence of a force older and more fundamental than the town which has given it hospitality (Fig. 110).

When we inquire into the origins and antiquity of the Irish towns we find that very few go back to pre-Norman times, while it is abundantly clear that periodic gatherings in "temporary towns" are far older. The pre-Christian fortress-palaces such as Tara and Navan did not survive into historic times, and as a rule the church in Celtic lands had no civic interests, though many a confiscated monastic site was revived as the nucleus of a town when occupied by English troops in the 16th century. Some coastal cities such as Dublin and Waterford were founded by Norsemen, but most of the inland towns grew up as castle-market-towns during the Anglo-Norman period or in the plantations of the 16th and 17th centuries. To-day the five chief seaports, none of them strictly "native," contain one quarter of the total population: very few inland towns have more than 10,000 people, and only one of these is outside the industrial Six Counties. Most of the fair centres have a population of from 500 to 5,000: there are 187 towns of this size in Eire. There are 202 "towns" with from 200 to 500 inhabitants and only 25 with more than 5,000 (Fig. 107).

It is to these small towns, scattered at convenient intervals of 10 or 15 miles up and down the country, that the fairs have been attracted, the centre of authority and administration becoming the centre of exchange. Although most of the settlements are of "foreign" origin, they have become thoroughly Irish. The family system and blood-ties link up town and country, and trade follows the personal bond of "friendship," that is, blood relationship, however remote. Over shops and inns it is family names one sees painted up: O'Flynn and Flanagan take the place of the English "General Stores" and "Red Lion." Since the countryman's money comes only at the periodic fairs, he relies on the shopkeeper's credit, and the debt must never be entirely paid off, for that

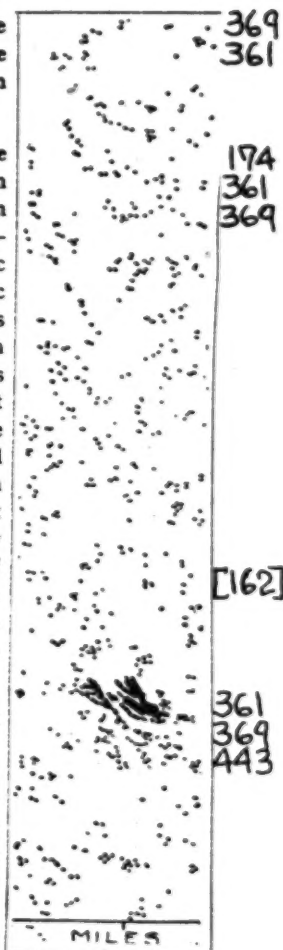


Fig. 107.

A market town with scattered country population. Each dot represents a building.

175 Books was at that time ten shillings sterling. In neither of these works is Inishshark mentioned.

The islands seem to have remained in the possession of the Clancarde family until early in the present century, when they passed, by exchange into the hands of the then Marquess of Sligo, from whom they came into the possession of the Wilberforce family, and from them into the hands of the present proprietor, Cyril Allie, Esq. The islands were transferred on 1st February, 1873, from the barony of Murrisk, County of Mayo, to the barony of Ballynahinch, County of Galway, by an Order in Council.

The establishment of the fishery station and the construction of new piers at Knock, and at the landing-place at Inishshark, by the Government in 1892, are the latest occurrences in the history of the islands.

#### VIII.—ETHNOLOGY.

● 174 In the present condition of Irish ethnology, it would be vain to attempt to propound any theory or form any exact conclusion as to what race or admixture of races gave origin to the present inhabitants of the islands. Their own traditional history speaks of the inter-marriage of some of the islanders with members of the Cromwellian garrison, and of an earlier introduction of a foreign element (some say French, others Danish or Spanish) by a piratical colony; and I am informed by Mr. G. H. Kinahan that he has heard that "a good sprinkling of foreigners remained in Bofin, that went there while the mine was working."

Judging from the list of surnames given on a preceding page, it would appear that the amount of foreign blood introduced must be considerably exaggerated, as an analysis of the list shows that a great majority of the names are those of old Connaught families. If the name of the proprietor of the islands, who is English, be left out, there are just fifty surnames on the islands, and thirty-three of these are distinctively Irish, and most of them are to be found in the account of the tribes of Hy Fiachrach, compiled by Donald Mac Firbis (though nearly all in Anglicized forms), eight are Welsh or Anglo-Norman, but of old standing in Connaught, dating back to the 13th century, two are Scotch (Naughton and M'Kendrick); one, Scuffle, is asserted by the people to be of Scandinavian or other foreign origin, and may probably be a corruption of Scholfield or Scovell; another, Lavelle, seems to be considered locally to be foreign also, but it is

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stated by some to be an Anglicized form of a well-known Irish tribe name; the seven remaining surnames seem to be modern English. 174●

Of the 212 families now living on the islands 20<sup>1</sup> have surnames of modern English or Scottish origin—29 Anglo-Norman or Welsh, 22 are Scuffles, 17 Lavelles, and the remaining 134 bear more or less Anglicized forms of old Irish names. It may be concluded from this that the population is, on the whole, not much mixed with any element which might not be expected to be found in western Connaught.

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<sup>1</sup> Including the landlord's.

175 given leases and were accompanied by a clergyman of their own persuasion; the only original inhabitants obtaining leases were the Cormicks. This colony does not appear to have made any extensive change in the composition of the population, as the settlers after a time ceased to be agriculturists to any extent, and took the natives of the district on to their lands as tenants. A curious petition to Sir Henry Bingham, Governor of Connaught, in reference to the revenge taken on these settlers by the natives, shows the names of those in the district in the reign of Queen Anne, and of these but two now remain, all the rest having disappeared, a fate which is ascribed by Mr. Knight to the habits of extravagance induced by the nature of their life. Sir Arthur Shaen began the canal across the neck of the Mullet, but soon abandoned the project, which was not revived until after the foundation of the town of Belmullet. Sir Arthur's two daughters, he had no sons, married, one Henry Boyle Carter of Castlemartin, county Kildare, and the other John Bingham Esq., Newbrook, county Mayo, and the property was divided between these two.

In the year 1793 a fight took place in the Mullet between the local yeomanry and the people of the district, in which thirty-six of the latter were slain. The origin of the fight was the opposition to the enrolment of the militia, then causing a great stir in the west of Ireland. Major Bingham having come to reside in the Mullet in 1796 built Bingham Castle at Eley, and began to make some roads and reclaim some of the land. The first road into the district was made in 1823, and about the same period Major Bingham founded the town in the Mullet known as Binghamstown, which at first was fairly prosperous and had at one time a population of 673.

[511] In 1823 the first vehicle entered the Mullet, and in 1824 Mr. W. H. Carter founded the town of Belmullet at the neck of the peninsula. This town being more favourably situated, has completely destroyed its rival Binghamstown, which, though once containing some fine buildings, is now in ruins, and contains only about a dozen inhabited houses. From the time of the establishment of Belmullet and the construction of good roads into the districts, the condition of the people has shown steady improvement, though it is still extremely primitive and poverty-stricken.

#### VIII.—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

● 174 This report being, like its two predecessors, a record of available facts, as found, in order to form a basis for comparison between different parts of the country, all advocacy of personal theories or opinions

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has been carefully avoided, it being evident that in the present state of British ethnology there is not sufficient material available from which to draw exact conclusions as to what race or admixture of races forms the bulk of the population of this part of Erris. History when combined with a study of the folk-names gives some slight help in this respect. So far as records go, the population seems to have been until comparatively recent times an almost unmixed one, as it does not appear as if the aboriginal inhabitants, though several times subdued and enslaved, had ever been driven out or exterminated. Of the immigrations into the district those having greatest effect upon the population would seem to have been that of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, the rule of the Barrets, Burkes, and other Walsh or Anglo-Norman families, whose surnames now bulk largely among the people, and the influx into Erris of the O'Donnells and others from Ulster in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Of these two the former would seem to have entered more largely into the composition of the people than the latter, but it should not be concluded that all those who bore the surnames of Barret, Burke, &c., were of Welsh or Anglo-Norman blood, as the followers of many of the chiefs of these names were in the habit of assuming their leaders' names, though themselves aborigines of Connaught. The descendants of the Ulster people, though to some extent settled in this district, are for the greater part a colony by themselves in the mountainous region of Ballycroy in the south of Erris.

The English Protestant colony introduced by Sir Arthur Shane, having almost from the first set up as small landlords or middlemen, subletting their holdings, did not mix to any extent with the original inhabitants who became their tenants, have left but few descendants, most of the families having left this part of the country. It is said that about Portacloy the people are mainly of Ulster origin, but that there has been a slight admixture of French blood from the intermarriage amongst them of some soldiers of Humbert's forces who, escaping after their defeat at Ballinamuck, found refuge in that wild mountainous district.

The inhabitants of Inishkea possess, as has been before stated, quite different characters, physically and otherwise, from those of their mainland neighbours; they have no traditions as to their origin, but may be looked upon as probably the most unmixed representatives of the original inhabitants of the district.

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form the basis of a reconstructed Ireland. One of his proposals, perhaps the most original of all the varied suggestions for solving 'the Irish problem', was to import a further 200,000 English settlers so as to bring the total English population to half a million, and then to remove the 20,000 unmarried Irish girls and marry them off 'one in every English parish', replacing them by 20,000 English girls to be married to Irishmen. In this way the Irish language, food, clothing and customs would be replaced by English modes.<sup>1</sup> Petty's scientific approach was devoid of sentiment and left him without sympathy for the Irish past. Other seventeenth-century writers, however, interested themselves in the ancient forts and towers, and Sir James Ware, who published his *Irish Antiquities* in 1654, also collected Irish manuscripts. This antiquarianism was continued by the brothers Molyneux, whose essays were the first of countless misguided speculations on Danish Mounts and Round Towers.

The eighteenth century brought a more rational view of Ireland, thanks especially to Arthur Young, whose *Travels in Ireland* (1776-79) are justly renowned. There followed a spate of travellers throughout the nineteenth century, aided by improved communications and attracted, after 1845, by the grim spectacle of the Great Famine. Unfortunately most of the visitors, finding, in the words of the Earl of Bristol, 'nothing curious to engage admiration and nothing horrid enough to stare at', do not give us details such as contemporary travellers were eagerly gathering from remoter lands. Yet their accounts, vitiated as many of them are by prejudice and an assumption of moral superiority, do give us first-hand descriptions of conditions in rural Ireland before and after the famine. From the first decades of the nineteenth century we have valuable sources of information in the Ordnance Survey maps and letters, in the census returns and in the Statistical Surveys compiled for [659] the Royal Dublin Society, covering nearly all the thirty-two counties of Ireland.

If we ask why so much of the past lives on in Ireland we must first notice the position of the island at the north-western extremity of the old world, the 'last outpost of Eurasia'.<sup>2</sup> Until

<sup>1</sup>Sir W. Petty, *The Political Anatomy of Ireland* (1691), 30.

<sup>2</sup>Grenville Cole, *Ireland the Outpost*, 9.

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174 the way to the New World was opened up—a route the Irish were fated to follow in their millions—cultures and peoples moving across Europe found their last resting place in this Atlantic island. Here we need only pick out some of the most striking examples of such movements. Archaeologists have shown that the first Irishmen, who entered the island by the short sea-route from Scotland at a time, perhaps 7,000 or 8,000 years ago, when thanks to a lower sea-level it was even shorter than it is today, were the descendants of Old Stone Age man who sought refuge there. For nearly half the period that has since elapsed they were the only occupants of a heavily forested land which they shared with the beasts and the birds. As hunters, fishers and fowlers they spread slowly along the coasts and by tangled lakes and waterways south and southwest across Ireland. Their physical characters may be found in a small proportion of modern Irishmen, and certain of their habits, such as the building of lake-dwellings (crannogs) survived until a few centuries ago, while some of their skills—for example the skin boat or curragh—and their cults—the ancient rituals of fisherfolk and hunters—linger on to this day. The description, in the Irish legendary histories, of the first inhabitants of the land as fishers and fowlers may well be a genuine folk memory. In this oldest stratum, now almost submerged, Ireland preserves a sample of Palaeolithic Europe. Deep in this layer lie the roots of many superstitious customs, which [189] depend for their efficacy on sympathetic magic such as is believed to have inspired the cave-artists of France and Spain.

The revolution in human economy and thought which is associated with food-production, the Neolithic revolution, began to affect Ireland about 4,000 years ago, carried by refugees and adventurers from Britain and also from France, Spain and the western Mediterranean lands. Thanks to an abundance of alluvial gold and copper the early metal age which followed was a period of increasing prosperity and industrial skill, when the products of Irish craftsmen found distant markets in Britain and on the continent. Throughout the Bronze Age the island was protected from the full force of the continental invasions which spent themselves in Britain: it was able to absorb such influences as trickled across the Irish Sea and to retain many of

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its old habits, as is illustrated by the persistence of cremation rites from the earliest megalithic phase to the end of the Bronze Age, almost on the threshold of the Christian era. 174 ●

At some stage towards the close of the Bronze Age the expanding Celtic culture, carried with the sword across western Europe, was able to gain a foothold in the north-east, whence in time it imposed itself and its language on the whole of Ireland and later, by way of Argyll, on Scotland too. But the price of this conquest was the loss of many elements of Celtic culture or their adaptation to the Irish environment and to long-established native tradition. The art of the Celtic overlords, for example, quickly develops forms and features which are insular and distinctively Irish. In other words there is more continuity of folk ways throughout the prehistoric period in Ireland than in Britain. And this Irish-Celtic civilization of the Early Iron Age was able, during the following period, to maintain itself through the centuries when the Roman Empire embraced nearly all western Europe. The spirit of its art and life was almost untouched by the mass-production and standardization of imperial Rome. It survived long enough to be caught up and revitalized in the late Celtic phase by the fervour of a Christian faith whose adaptation to Celtic tradition is illustrated in Saint Columba's famous phrase: 'Christ is my druid'. It was a time of great missionary enterprise, but at home its greatest achievement was the taming of the damp lowland forests which earlier peoples had shunned. Legendary history, now receiving confirmation from archaeological research, tells of technological advances and increasing population and settlement from about the seventh century onwards. [776]

Irish Christianity grew up within the forms of Irish life: the church claimed no martyrs and there is little evidence of conflict with older beliefs, which clearly were absorbed. The Celtic church was peculiar in that the centres of its life were the great monasteries: there were no cities to form the seats of powerful bishops. Instead, the founders' kin retained the ownership of the monasteries, and the Celtic tradition survived in administration as in art and architecture. It was only after the ravages of the Vikings and the reassertion of pagan cults that the Irish Church was reformed by Saint Malachy, who established 795 175

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133 the extreme north-east, where granites and lavas of Tertiary age are outliers of the Scoto-Icelandic igneous province. In Co. Antrim the basaltic lavas have covered and preserved with their armour-plating both red Triassic sandstone and white Cretaceous limestone (chalk) to give sea cliffs of strangely contrasted colours facing the North Channel. The western mountains are also of great age: the monotony of their bog-strewn schists is relieved only by lines of great quartzite peaks which break into the ocean at Croaghnaun and Slievemore in Achill Island. In the south-west the parallel folds of Old Red Sandstone finger out to the Atlantic between Dingle Head and Mizen Head, and here again the highest summits are all in sight of the sea. The granite core of the Wicklow Mountains dominates the south-east in the most massive and continuous high ground in the country, and touches the sea on the outskirts of Dublin. Similarly in the north-east Slieve Donard, the highest summit of the Mourne Mountains, raises its great dome to 2,796 ft. only  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles from the Irish Sea.

174  
133 Only on the east coast, between the Wicklow Chain and the Carlingford Mountains, is the highland rim broken wide open in a 50-mile gateway giving access to the interior. Floored by well-drained glacial soils and favoured by a low rainfall of less than thirty inches in the year, this strip of coast has been for 1,000 years Ireland's metropolitan region. In fact, long before Dublin was founded by the Vikings, Tara claimed to be the capital of all Ireland, and not far away the island's most spectacular prehistoric monuments—the corbelled chamber tombs of the Boyne Valley—take us back to the early Bronze Age. The dark age Middle Kingdom of Meath, based on Tara and the Boyne Valley, looks backward to the glories of the Bronze Age and forward to the English Pale which was the first conquest and the final refuge of the Anglo-Norman planters. Its landscape and character are distinctive to this day. What the Middle Kingdom and the Pale both lacked was a natural frontier to the west comparable to the Border Hills of Scotland or to the upland edge of the Welsh Marches.

174 The other four kingdoms, which have survived as the four provinces, broadly correspond to the four areas—north, west, south-west and south-east—which have upland massifs as their

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nuclei. We may think of the four kingdoms as slowly crystallizing throughout prehistoric times around areas of primary settlement among the hills. The political organization of these areas had to await the coming of Celtic conquerors, but fundamental in their differentiation are the divergencies in megalithic practice. The penetration of megalithic culture to all parts of the island is one of the most striking facts in the prehistory of Ireland. Again and again, in seeking for the origins of persistent customs we find ourselves led back to the megalith builders and their monumental preoccupation with death and the after-world. The domination of the megalithic cult was much more complete in the western isle than in Britain, where it took root mainly in the uplands facing the Irish Sea. 174

All around the Irish coasts the megalith builders found hill masses where shallow soils and thinning forests gave them a foothold and ice-carried boulders provided the material for their gigantic tombs and ritual circles. It is significant that the megaliths appear to fall into four major regional groups—five if we include the Boyne area—which correspond with the historic provinces. This has been most clearly demonstrated for Ulster where the distribution of 'horned cairns' has been shown to correspond closely with the upland areas north of the Dundalk-Sligo line.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Meath, Dublin and Louth contain the finest passage-graves, of which New Grange on the Boyne is the supreme example. I have no doubt that the ground pattern of regional differentiation in Ireland was established in the megalithic era during the first half of the second millennium B.C.

It remains to say something of the lowland heart of Ireland where the four provinces meet along the line of the middle Shannon north and south of Lough Ree, which is the geometrical centre both of the lowlands and of the whole island. Near-by Athlone, therefore, serves as the centre of Eire's broadcasting system, but in no terrestrial sense is this bog-strewn central lowland a dominant cultural region. Its function has been largely negative, for it has served as a refuge area remote from the contacts of the coastal fringe and the urban forces which radiate [207]

<sup>1</sup>O. Davies and E. E. Evans, 'The Horned Cairns of Ulster', *U.J.A.* 6 (1943), 7-23.

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- 174 from it. The Gaelic conquest of the Irish Midlands was not completed until the sixth century A.D., and down to the Anglo-Norman invasions the distinction between free and tributary tribes remained.<sup>1</sup> The counties bordering the middle Shannon—Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford and the western parts of Westmeath and Offaly—are probably as full of survivals as any in Ireland. This is the land of the loy and the steeveen (Chapter X) and the last home of many an ancient custom. The lowland of which it is the centre is floored with limestone levelled off at about 200 ft. but diversified by occasional low hills, by intricate solution lakes and by glacial eskers and drifts among which lie countless small lakes and bogs (Fig. 5). It is hard to realize [133] the isolation from which this area suffered before the introduction of improved wheeled vehicles and the coming of the canal and the railway.<sup>2</sup>

- 311 Let us now look at the cultural landscape which the hand of man has fitted to the physical frame of the island. Although man has been in this country for only a fraction of the time he has occupied South England and the continent, his mark is everywhere. Wander where you will through the length and breadth of the island, and through the dozens of lesser isles around its shores, and you will never fail to see traces of human activity, past or present, even in the most empty and inaccessible spots. Apart from the more or less datable remains of church and rath, castle and cairn, the land is covered with the marks of man's toil. The history of rural Ireland could be read out of doors, had we the skill, from the scrawlings made by men in the field boundaries of successive periods. In them the unlettered countryman wrote his runes on the land. The student of historical geography has been greatly assisted in the task of interpreting this palimpsest by the new tool of air-photography which, given suitable conditions, will pick out all man-made marks on the face of the earth.

- 311 The sturdy field walls and hedged banks which give the  
178 countryside its intimate character are by no means as immutable

<sup>1</sup>T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (1946), 204.

<sup>2</sup>Improvements in public transport were initiated by the Italian, Bianconi, who, profiting from the cavalry horses thrown on the market after the Napoleonic wars, began his famous fleet of 'cars' in Tipperary in 1816.

## PLOUGH AND SPADE

407 version of the foot-plough. This is an almost unexplored field  
241 of rural history. Mr. Aitken is of the opinion, however, that  
the left-sided plough goes with the use of the right hand as  
holding hand.

412 At any rate it is interesting to find that in Ireland the majority  
241 of diggers use the right foot, and although in theory the  
wooden foot-rest of the native one-eared spade can be fitted  
either to left or right of the narrow blade it is, in the west,  
almost invariably on the right side. Presumably only habitually  
left-handed people use the left foot. In eastern Ireland, on the  
other hand, and particularly in the Protestant districts of the  
north-east, the left foot is normally the digging-foot, though  
judging from the proportions of right to left (about one to three  
in the north-east), the old Irish stocks continue to dig with the  
right foot. Hence there is a basis of fact in the phrase 'digging  
[539] with the wrong foot'. (To say that someone digs with the other  
[798] foot is in Ireland an oblique way of referring to his religious  
faith.) The old Irish spade, we have seen, is a highly specialized  
tool. It may have been preceded by some kind of hoe or planting  
stick such as are represented today by the graffan or the steeveen  
which we describe in the following chapter.

● 174 We have no direct evidence of Bronze Age ploughs in Ire-  
407 land, though marks of furrows have been observed underneath  
241 burial barrows of that period in Jutland and Holland and it has  
been claimed that the *ard* had reached the west Baltic region  
before the end of the Neolithic phase. However this may be the  
sod-cutting spade, which could be supplemented by the wooden  
shovel, is not likely to have been introduced much before the  
beginning of the Christian era, since it required an efficient  
knowledge of iron-working. By facilitating the building of  
ridges it would have improved crop yields during a climatic  
period, the sub-Atlantic, which was even wetter than at present.  
A mould-board plough capable of forming ridges did not reach  
Ireland on present evidence until about the seventh century,  
and as we have seen it had not been adopted in parts of the west  
until the nineteenth century. Thus the narrow spade, coming  
into use at about the same time as oats, would have been a  
factor in stabilizing settlement by permitting ridge cultivation  
on the outfield grazing ground round about. This is speculative,

PLOUGH AND SPADE

but it is at least clear that with the introduction of the potato in the seventeenth century it was the spade that facilitated the breaking-in of rough pasture by means of 'lazy-beds', and so made possible the great expansion of cultivation and population in the century before the Great Famine. To this day the one-eared spade, in endless variety, has kept its medieval simplicity and diversity, though it is fast disappearing in favour of the two-eared spade. It may still be seen in the west and south, and a heavy variety is at home in the upper Shannon basin, in the counties of Leitrim, Sligo, west Cavan, Longford, and Roscommon. This is the loy (Fig. 41) a veritable foot-plough with a massive heavy handle expanding on one side into a foot-ledge and below into a stout heel which acts as a pivot when the undercut sod is being turned over in ridge-making. 'This machine they prefer to ploughs', wrote McParlan.<sup>1</sup> Seasoned old men will tell you that they couldn't make ridges unless they had a loy, and they add, scornful of the rising generation, that 'the young people going nowadays couldn't carry a loy'. There was much opposition to the light two-eared spades when they made their appearance in the early nineteenth century. They were objected to above all because, the diggers not wearing boots—the native shoe was at best a flimsy raw-hide cover—the iron would cut their feet. To this day the Irish two-eared spade is distinguished from the English spade by having iron foot-plates (Fig. 41).

The metal spade probably began its life as a mere cutting edge of iron attached to the mouth of a narrow wooden spade. It is still little more than an attachment to a wooden shaft, consisting of an open iron socket which folds around the end of the shaft and passes at an angle into a strong narrow blade. I regard the loy as the most primitive type because the pivot or 'lift' is largely in the heel of the wooden shaft or 'tree', whereas in the rather lighter Munster spade—variants of which are also found in Kilkenny and Galway—the whole pivot is provided by the bent blade. The Longford-Cavan loy, which is adapted to heavy glacial or peaty soils, is a very clumsy digging tool, though well adapted for sod-turning. In experienced hands the loy 'would go in of itself' thanks to its weight and the expanded

<sup>1</sup>J. McParlan, *Leitrim* (1802), 25.

BOATS AND FISHING

501 where curraghs were formerly known. But it is also character-  
istic of Scottish cobbles and the boats of some English lakes.  
171 The inshore fishing boats of Co. Antrim also had booled oars,<sup>1</sup>  
and farther afield the single tholepin is said to typify the rowing  
boats of Madeira, the sardine boats of Portugal and some  
vessels of the Upper Nile. These often use a grommet, as do  
the boats of the north-east coast of England.

226 Sea-going curraghs are put to many uses, for inshore net  
fishing, for setting lobster pots or long lines, for gathering  
kelp and for carrying freight, livestock and passengers. But  
the most spectacular purpose to which they have been put is for  
[373] hunting the basking shark or sunfish from whose liver, before  
the advent of paraffin, oil for lighting was obtained. A single  
fish will yield from seven to ten barrels of liver. Measuring  
up to forty feet in length, the basking shark is one of the world's  
largest fish and though harmless—its diet is minute copepods—  
its bulk makes it a formidable adversary. These fish move  
down the west coast in summer, and in early May they haunt  
the Sunfish Bank thirty miles off Achill Island, where they  
come to the surface in the morning and evening. The bank is  
remarkable for the break of the tide on it, although it lies be-  
tween seventy and ninety fathoms near the edge of 'soundings'  
—the continental shelf—and a heavy swell makes conditions  
difficult for small boats. Here and elsewhere the sunfish used  
to be harpooned from curraghs, but the advantage lay with  
decked vessels which could stand by for several days. In the  
early nineteenth century as many as thirty or forty fish were  
sometimes killed on the Sunfish Bank in a single day of fine  
weather. Nowadays the sharks are taken in strong nets fixed to  
island headlands around which they swim. They are occasionally  
seen off the other Irish coasts, where they cause great havoc if  
they get involved in the fishing nets.

501 Of the small open clinker-built boats of traditional type which  
takes the place of the curragh on the north, east and south  
● [174] coasts, no systematic study has been made. Some of them betray  
their Norse inheritance in their lines or their names, for example  
the Wicklow skiff and the drontheim (Trondhjem) of the  
north coast. These boats are double-ended—unlike the cur-

<sup>1</sup>S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 276.

12 • THE ISLAND AND ITS PAST

turies afterward, and still do in modified form, and became embodied in the medieval culture which was shaped by internal innovation and borrowing from other European traditions. Christianity came to Inis Beag in the early decades of the sixth century. Inis Beag and the other islands in the vicinity became one of the famous monastic centers of Ireland, where over a hundred saints lived or paid extended visits. Among them were St. Enda of the Aran Islands, St. Columbkille who was to Christianize Scotland and much of England, St. Kieran the founder of Clonmacnoise, St. Brendan the Navigator who according to Irish legend reached the coast of Florida in 551, and St. Kevin the founder of Glendalough. Among the principal medieval Christian monuments in Inis Beag are three churches, one and possibly two monasteries, several tombs, and a sacred well.

Only a single female saint is associated with Inis Beag, and a church in her honor stands on the northwest side of the island. Although not the first church on the site, the present building was erected not later than the ninth century, and west of its doorway under a cliff is the foundation of a *clochán* in which the officiating clergyman may have resided. South of the church are a number of ancient tombs, and in a small valley east of it a layer of midden lies beneath manufactured soil. The axe heads were unearthed in the valley only a stone's throw from the church.

Built in the tenth century to honor the patron saint of the island, a second church is located atop a terrace overlooking the beach on the northeast side of Inis Beag. It was used as the regular place of worship until about 1840, when sand began to accumulate about it; at that time, the island cemetery was on a slight hill west of the church, but as the sand grew deeper burials were made next to the church, eventually to form the present cemetery which rings the building almost completely. The tomb of the patron saint stands on the surface of the terrace a short distance from the church, but it and the building nearly to the top of its gables are buried in the sand (see Fig. 3). Each year on June 14th island men dig out the interior of the church and bare the tomb to commemorate the saint. A huge midden, partially covered with sand and solidified to a conglomerate below its surface, is banked against the terrace on the north and measures 20 feet in depth, 150 feet in width, and 450 feet in length. It represents the accumulation of hundreds of years, and possibly thousands if pagan structures antedated Christian ones.

A third church lies buried beneath the sand close to the east end of the beach, and is named after another saint who is believed to be interred near it. Only legend supports its existence, for there is no reference to its unencumbered appearance in the writings of the earliest visitors in the mid-seventeenth century. However, funeral processions bound from the present church to the cemetery leave the main trail to follow what is apparently an archaic predecessor deep in the sand, and at one point the coffin is lowered and the mourners kneel and pray for the soul of the deceased at the place where tradition asserts that the ancient church lies. This custom is disconcerting to the newly appointed or visiting priest, who sometimes when leading a funeral procession will continue on the modern path while the islanders desert him to obey a centuries old prescription.

On the west side of Inis Beag, near the shore, are located a holy well named after a saint and the *clochán* in which he supposedly dwelled during a lengthy stay

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*Figure 3. Church of the patron saints and the cemetery*

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on the island during the early part of the sixth century. A low wall with two openings has been constructed about the spring, and it is visited frequently by those wishing to obtain water or to pray. I was told by the owners of surrounding fields that when they were children many gallery grave tombs stood in the area, but most of these were removed when the fields first were improved and seeded. Most islanders will not molest prehistoric and medieval monuments, especially those that they believe are burial places, out of reverence for the dead or fear of the ghosts or fairies who reside within them; but down the centuries, such structures gradually have disappeared by being torn down to satisfy building and farming needs. It is the emphatic claim of the folk that the sacred well was created miraculously by the visiting saint and has never dried up, but two unbiased observers reported to me that they had seen it waterless during especially dry summers.

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At least twice during the Middle Ages Inis Beag was laid waste by invading forces: first by Vikings in 1081 (and maybe on other occasions between the ninth and eleventh centuries, when much of Ireland came under the control of Norwegians and Danes), and then in 1334 by Sir John Darcy, the Lord Justice of Ireland, who with a large fleet and army sailed around the Irish coast implementing British rule. The islanders believe that Inis Beag was completely depopulated by the Vikings and possibly by the Darcy expedition, and again by wars once, and maybe twice, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

#### Modern Period (1500 to 1900)

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The castle in Inis Beag built within the Celtic promontory fort, probably erected in the sixteenth century by the mainland family who owned the island,

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is a three-story tower house with its south and west walls partially destroyed. The middle story of the castle rests on vaults, and there are carved corbels projecting from the north and east walls. It is believed that the castle was assaulted in 1652 from the land side by Cromwellian troops, who disembarked at the back of the island and hauled their heavy cannons across the limestone pavement, unimpeded by the stone fences which stand today, to the monastery above the tower.

Queen Elizabeth annexed Inis Beag for the Crown in 1586 because of its strategic position, after two contending Irish families had appealed to her following their fierce battle for its possession, in which all of the folk may have been slaughtered. From 1586 until the first decade of the eighteenth century, Commonwealth, Loyalist, and Williamite forces were stationed in Inis Beag most of the time, and until 1886, when obtained by the Irish Land Commission, the island was owned by a succession of absentee Anglo-Irish landlords. When Cromwellian troops forced the surrender of Loyalists in 1652, the population of Inis Beag once again may have been decimated, although one legend holds that only males were put to the sword. The island after 1655 became a port for transshipment of clerics who were exiled to the West Indies. This was the time when Cromwell revenged himself on Irish Catholics and their Protestant allies by appropriating for his followers more than half of the Irish soil and leveling harsh political, commercial, and religious penalties. Thousands of priests were banished, including all of the bishops for a time, in his crusade.

It was after the Restoration in 1660 that the land of Inis Beag was divided into quarters, half-quarters, and smaller units and assigned to families. My genealogical research reveals that all of the families of Inis Beag trace descent from immigrants who arrived in the island during and after the last half of the seventeenth century. The early arrivals, as well as any survivors, may have intermarried and interbred with soldiers posted in the island, for anthropometric and blood group analyses (buttressed by surname and historical evidence and local legend) show that the folk more closely resemble the northern English than they do their mainland cousins. A Dublin humor magazine featured a cartoon, not favored in nativistic quarters, showing Inis Beag men in traditional attire playing cricket.

The islanders still express considerable bitterness over the conditions of poverty and servitude experienced by their ancestors during the 300 years that they lived under alien landlords. All of the excesses of foreign domination suffered by mainland peasants were suffered by Inis Beag folk, but were aggravated by the ordinary hardships of island living. Little is known of local events in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, until the island was "rediscovered" by Petrie and O'Flaherty. There was trading between Inis Beag and communities along the mainland coast for many miles, and ships passing by often dropped anchor at the island; but at that time this region of Ireland was very much isolated and seldom visited. A military garrison once again was established in Inis Beag for a brief period during the Napoleonic Wars, when the English feared an invasion of the British Isles from the west by French forces. A watch tower was constructed on the island, one of a chain along the Atlantic coast of Ireland, to give early warning of invasion.

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household. Some cats have reverted to a wild state and roam the back of the island, sheep occasionally are killed by hungry dogs, and young people will entertain themselves by baiting dogs to fight. By and large, animals, especially asses, in Inis Beag are treated roughly or with indifference.

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Fishing

It is estimated that between 30 and 50 three-men crews from Inis Beag fished regularly almost the year around at the beginning of the century. At that time there were ten families of fisherfolk—six in Low Village, two in High, and one each in the other two communities—who subsisted mainly on money obtained from the sale of their catches or by bartering fish for needed goods and services. Only farming and kelp-making intermittently interfered with the fishing regime of landholders, and fishing ceased altogether only for parts of December and January, when inclement weather and the Christmas season intruded. Women and children were deeply involved in the fishing endeavor, just as they were in farming and livestock rearing, to free their menfolk for fishing. Crews ranged the coast of Inis Beag and neighboring islands, the two sounds, the mainland coast for 20 miles, and Atlantic shallows 5 to 8 miles offshore. Lines 40 fathoms in length were "shot" for ling and cod, and nets over a mile in length were drifted to ensnare spring mackerel. At times when fish were particularly abundant, fishermen would be out daily for a week or two, arising long before dawn to have their lines down before daybreak, and returning home as late as midnight.

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Sixty years later, a sharply contrasting situation prevails, wherein not only has the exporting of fish almost been discontinued, but fish no longer rank as a major staple in the diet of the folk and are not even eaten several months of the year. Nine three-men crews fished fairly regularly with nets and lines between February and October of 1960 and exported or sold locally part of their catches, and two crews fished for lobsters. Fishing now is carried on within a mile of the island, and only one crew ventured as far as the mainland in 1960. It was customary in the past for crews to fish for two consecutive days off a mainland peninsula and sleep overnight in their canoes or lodge in a village there, a venture which required over 30 miles of backbreaking labor at the oars. Line fishing today is done in shallow waters, only short nets are employed, and the men do not care to spend long hours at their task. Elders bemoan the present state of affairs for several reasons, one of them being the loss of fishing lore accumulated over the centuries—knowledge of the ocean floor, of deep currents, of the habitats and movements of fish, not to mention knowledge relating to the manufacture and care of fishing gear and fishing techniques themselves.

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Most important of the factors which gradually have restricted fishing are the actions of foreign trawlers—particularly Spanish and French ones, the shift of migratory routes of fish, and long range changes in the weather. During the 1890s, foreign trawlers commenced to fish the waters surrounding Inis Beag, and in the decades since they have increased in number and have fished ever closer to the coast, until now they often penetrate within the legal limit. Not only have

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[513] underclothing retained. The latter practice reflects extreme modesty as well as  
[515] the need for warmth. Islanders have an obsessive fear of nakedness which permits  
them, after infancy, to bathe only their feet, hands, and face and precludes bathing  
in the sea and the use of bathtubs.

### Crafts

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434 Of the several crafts practiced in Inis Beag, only three are strictly income  
[501] instead of combined subsistence-income activities: the manufacture of *curach* by  
[293] four men, the mass production of stockings by four girls in the factory at the  
coast guard station, and the fashioning of miniature canoes by a single man.  
[294] Sweaters, woven belts, cowhide shoes, and the small multi-colored shawls are  
[438] made both for local wear and for export. Most of the exported sweaters are sold  
[657] to a particular mainland firm for resale, as are all of the model canoes, and the  
[437] factory is sponsored by Gaeltacht Éireann which markets the stockings produced.  
Other craft commodities are sold by the folk directly to consumers, most of whom  
are tourists.

501 The long rowing canoe of Inis Beag is distributed widely along the west  
[171] coast of Ireland, from Cos. Donegal to Kerry, and its seaworthy qualities as well as  
[174] the rowing skill of the crews which sail it are renowned. One of a number of  
[178] varieties of the coracle, which has a heritage extending back to the Mesolithic, it  
is built of deal and oak lathes and covered with tarred canvas (see Fig 10). Before  
canvas was introduced, untanned seal, cow, and horse hides were used for covering,  
and these were reported from a nearby island less than 100 years ago. The *curach*  
is approximately 20 feet in length, has a high pointed nose, is round bellied and  
lacks a keel, draws less than 6 inches of water, and is rowed with narrow 10-foot-  
501 long oars. These oars are bladeless for use in rough seas and are pivoted on single  
502 tholepins rather than in oarlocks. The looms of the oars overlap, so that oarsmen  
must pull cross-handed, and on long journeys a lug sail is hoisted to relieve the  
crew. For the neophyte, rowing a *curach* cross-handed in a heavy sea can be even  
more abusive of the hands than rebuilding a gateway in a stone fence. Most  
canoes hold three men—are "three-oared"—but two-, four-, and even five-men  
*curach* were or are used. Loads up to a ton and a half can be accommodated, and  
trussed asses, sheep, and horses sometimes are transported in them.

501 Forty-two householders in Inis Beag own three-men canoes, among whom  
[502] three have additional two-oared *curach*. The craft are stored upside down in "cots"  
on either side of the strand along the margins of the common land, although  
Terrace villagers use a small beach along the northeast coast of the island; they  
are carried between the cots and the water upside down on the shoulders of the  
[433] crew, and in that position resemble gigantic beetles. Two Inis Beag men are at  
[322] work building canoes most of the time, and when they are not busy at this task they  
construct furniture for local sale. Two other men manufacture *curach* occasionally,  
[184] and another two who once built them have discontinued the practice. No canoe  
makers are found elsewhere in the region; therefore, Inis Beag artisans serve the

796 to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

798 The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Beag. It was customary until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of paganism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well and seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. [312] The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

### Pagan Supernaturalism

771 Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as 798 attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual entities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited 793 occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family 787 feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When [829] the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion [776] to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night [115] resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will [776] happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul

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misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

### Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.

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175 November 1st. Imbolc heralded the coming of spring with the lactation of ewes,  
796 while at Beltaine cattle were driven to open grazing after passing between bon-  
221 fires which magically protected them against disease and ensured their fertility.  
The harvest commenced with Lughnasa, and the grazing season ended with  
796 Samhain. Of these festivals, Imbolc has become reinterpreted with the feast of St.  
178 Brigid; Beltaine and Samhain, known today as May Day and Allhallows respec-  
[771] tively, have remained almost untouched by Christianity and are observed in  
[114] Inis Beag; but Lughnasa has disappeared from island tradition. Lughnasa still is  
celebrated in many parts of Ireland and is the subject of a monumental folklore  
study—Maire MacNeill's *The Festival of Lughnasa*; until the introduction of  
early potatoes into Inis Beag, harvesting commenced on this day, but any other  
practices associated with Lughnasa were abandoned long ago. Minor pagan festi-  
vals have become reinterpreted with Whitsuntide and the feasts of St. John, St.  
Martin, and St. Stephen, all of which are observed in Inis Beag.

776 Brigid, the most renowned of Irish female saints, was a cowherd and  
[824] therefore is associated with cattle and with flowers, such as the dandelion, which  
nourish young lambs in the spring. On the last day of January, a small "Brigid's  
776 Cross" is fashioned from straw in each household of Inis Beag, and is thrust into  
778 the thatching at the end of the feast day. Crosses once were made from rushes,  
[824] wood, metal, and even paper, and it is possible to determine the age of a thatched  
[174] cottage being dismantled or renovated by counting the number of crosses salvaged  
[175] from the straw debris. The Celts worshipped the sun whose symbol was the  
swastika, and the Brigid's Cross takes this form. It is a charm which protects the  
house (and the byre on the mainland) and those within it from harm, especially  
735 by fire, during the year. At the beginning of this century, a destitute woman who  
776 lived alone used to go from door to door begging for food and carrying a large  
778 "Brigid's Doll" made of straw and dressed immaculately in white with a picture  
of the saint on its breast. Some of the folk pulled straw from the doll to manu-  
[538] facture their crosses. After the woman recited the following poem, she was pre-  
[782] sented with food in honor of the saint, for which she blessed each person in the  
household with the doll:

[539]

Here comes Brigid  
Dressed in white.  
Give her something  
For the night.

She is deaf and  
She is dumb.  
For God's sake,  
Give her some.

536 Today, small groups of girls travel about the island emulating their predecessor  
735 by begging for coins to buy candy and donate to the church. A Brigid's Doll dressed  
431 in confirmation garb is carried by the leader of each group, and is used to confer  
776 blessings after the girls have recited in unison the two verses.  
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796 May Eve and Allhallows' Eve are both times when it is dangerous to go  
776 out of doors alone at night or be abroad after midnight, for the "big fellow"  
[822] roams the back of the island, and everywhere pagan fairies, witches, vindictive  
[778] ghosts, and the dog of the tumult search for human victims. The safety of cattle  
[233] is of particular concern to the folk on May Eve, and a common practice is to  
attach to the horn or tail of a cow a cloth containing a piece of iron which has

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775 parts fashioned by human hands. A valley in Inis Thiar is believed to have been  
772 created by such a ship passing over the island, "with a great roar and blowing of  
[173] wind." According to Celtic tradition, souls not only transmigrated to the Land of  
[825] Youth but became reincarnated on earth or embodied in animals through metem-  
psychosis. The belief in reincarnation appears not to have persisted in Inis Beag,  
but seals sometimes are thought to be repositories of souls; those creatures so  
possessed look and act human and attach themselves to fishermen who have aided  
or harmed them, and whose *curach* they will pursue relentlessly. I was told by an  
old man of a seal that he had cursed at sea for fouling his net, which later followed  
in his wake for many miles glaring with rage, and finally pursued him 30 feet  
onto the strand as he and his frightened mates carried the canoe hurriedly to its cot.

Religion and Personality

157 It is appropriate here to assess the basic personality structure of Inis Beag  
771 islanders, since traits such as sexual puritanism, hypochondria, depression, maso-  
chism, conformism, and ambivalence toward authority are linked causally with  
religion in a very direct manner. Other personality characteristics, already or yet  
to be considered, which are more peripheral to religion include secretiveness, envy  
and jealousy, dogmatism, indolence, feelings of inferiority, and verbal skill.

157 Probably the most prominent trait of Inis Beag (and Irish) personality is  
831 sexual puritanism. Its etiology is complex and much debated, but appears to  
embrace most significantly historical (such as the influence of ascetic monasticism  
and Jansenism), sociocultural (such as the Oedipus complex and male solidarity),  
and psychological (such as masochism) variables. How long it has been a major  
component of Irish national character is conjectural, for it is impossible to appraise  
with accuracy Irish society, culture, and personality prior to the nineteenth century.  
• [174] Sexual attitudes and behavior in Celtic, medieval, and early modern times can be  
surmised only from tangential and questionable sources; depending on which  
sources are quoted, as good a case can be made for sexual puritanism as its  
opposite before 1800.

157 The inculcation of sexual puritanism in Inis Beag must be examined in  
831 three contexts: informal social controls of the curate and those imposed by the  
864 islanders on themselves, the influence of visiting "missions," and enculturation in  
the home. The first of these has been taken up at length in the last chapter. Suffice  
426 it to say here, some folk (especially certain youths who consider themselves  
193 "worldly") resent the intrusions of priests and neighbors into their sexual lives.  
834 They ask what right have young, virginal, inexperienced, and sexually unknow-  
ledgeable curates to give advice and pass judgments in this sphere. Equally resented  
are those persons who hide themselves in the darkness or behind fences to over-  
hear the conversations of passersby, which may pertain to sexual matters, and  
those who maintain close scrutiny of visitors during the summer, both day and  
831 night, in order to discover them in "compromising" situations. Sexual rumors run  
203 rife in the island, such as those concerning the "nude" sunbathing of mainland  
[609] girls (bared shoulders and lower thighs) and the "attacks" on them at night by